



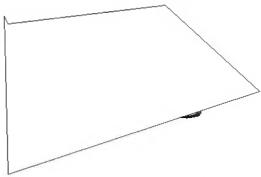
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Egypt: The Succession Issue

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An Intelligence Assessment

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Egypt: The Succession Issue

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An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 1 September 1981
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

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The author of this paper is [redacted] Near East South Asia Division, Office of Political Analysis. The appendix was prepared by the Office of Central Reference and the Center for the Analysis of Personality and Political Behavior, OPA.
Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Near East South Asia Division, OPA, [redacted]

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The paper was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia, the Directorate of Operations, the Office of Central Reference, and the Office of Geographic and Societal Research. [redacted]

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Egypt:
The Succession Issue

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Key Judgments

Loyalists of President Anwar Sadat are likely to dominate the succession process should the Egyptian leader die unexpectedly. Sadat's inner circle probably would nominate a candidate acceptable to key military leaders. Egyptian opposition groups would play no direct role in choosing a new president.

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Vice President Moubarek is Sadat's personal choice and is the most likely successor. Moubarek remains untested, however, and would need time to consolidate his position. Should Moubarek's bid for office falter, other contenders might emerge including Defense Minister Abu Ghazala, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs Hassan, and Foreign Minister Ali.

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A regime dominated by Moubarek or another Sadat intimate probably would initially focus on consolidating its power, while attempting to maintain close relations with the United States; strategic cooperation with Washington certainly would continue. A rapprochement with the Soviets would be unlikely.

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In time, the new government probably would place a high priority on easing Egypt's isolation and would seek improved ties with other Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia. It might be willing to allow the relationship with Israel to languish or cool. Although a regime of Sadat loyalists would not overturn the peace treaty with Israel, it might make moves that could provoke a crisis with Tel Aviv.

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In the event of massive and sustained popular unrest, the armed forces probably would intervene and install a moderate military regime. Such a government would continue Sadat's ties to the United States but might also seek close ties to Riyadh and take steps to reach an accommodation at home with the Islamic fundamentalists.

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A revolutionary regime—either of the left or the Islamic right—is unlikely in the near future but cannot be ruled out. An Islamic fundamentalist regime could emerge if the military leadership chooses not to intervene in politics. An Islamic-oriented government might terminate the peace treaty with Israel and turn inward. The left can seize power only through the less likely eventuality of a military coup. It probably also would terminate the treaty and move closer to the USSR, perhaps eventually breaking ties with the United States.

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Egypt:
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The Setting

President Anwar Sadat recently ordered the most massive crackdown on his domestic opponents since he took power in 1970, reviving concern about the stability of his regime. Sadat at 62 has many political enemies at home and in the Arab world

a presidential election. The speaker, however, cannot run for the office. The Assembly selects one candidate, whose name is then submitted to a popular referendum.

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Sadat remains vulnerable to massive civil disorders similar to the riots in January 1977 that threatened his position.

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The political scene in Egypt is very much a one-man affair and Sadat has more than once dismissed senior aides unexpectedly. No potential successor, even Vice President Moubarek, is secure if he arouses Sadat's displeasure. Moreover, when and how Sadat leaves the scene will determine in part who replaces him.

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Sadat's Views of Succession

Sadat has sought to safeguard constitutional provisions that will ensure a smooth transfer of power in the event of his death in office. He has often noted that after the death of President Nasir in 1970 power was transferred to him smoothly and quickly, and he has commented that "the only guarantee for a sound transfer of power is the existence of constitutional institutions."¹

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The Egyptian Constitution specifies that if the President dies, the Speaker of the People's Assembly, a post currently held by Sufi Abu Talib, will assume the presidency for 60 days, during which he is to organize

¹ Sadat occasionally has hinted that he may resign the presidency next year before his second six-year term expires in October. He made similar threats in 1976 and seems unlikely to follow through. In the event Sadat does choose not to run for reelection, however, he would play the key role in selecting a successor, who would most probably be Moubarek.

Vice President Moubarek

Sadat has indicated that in case of his death Moubarek—a political unknown until April 1975 when Sadat appointed him Vice President—should be the Assembly's candidate. Sadat has put Moubarek through a rigorous apprenticeship designed to give him a solid grounding in domestic and foreign affairs.

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In recent years Moubarek was often appointed acting President while Sadat was out of the country. In July, for example, Moubarek assumed "the tasks of President" just before and during Sadat's visits to the United Kingdom and the United States. Moubarek enjoys Sadat's confidence on all key issues and serves as his informal chief of staff, controlling access to the President.

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To ensure a smooth transfer of power, Sadat has permitted Moubarek to develop his own power base—albeit one that does not challenge Sadat's position. Moubarek, a former commander of the Egyptian Air Forces, overseas military affairs for Sadat and has sought to appoint trusted lieutenants to key posts in the military and intelligence services.

Moubarek also heads Sadat's political party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), which controls the People's Assembly and would legitimize the nomination of a successor to Sadat.

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Despite these factors in his favor, Moubarek's succession is not guaranteed and he will have to gain the support of several key interest groups to ensure his accession to, and a lasting hold on, the presidency. In 1970, for example, Sadat assumed the presidency

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Sadat and Moubarek confer after Sadat's visit to the United States in August. [redacted]

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smoothly and quickly, but it took him almost a year to consolidate his grip on power. In May 1971 he survived a coup plot engineered by pro-Soviet leftists led by then Vice President Ali Sabri [redacted]

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Sadat plays an important role in advising her husband on domestic issues, but her influence would decline rapidly after his death; she probably would play a marginal role in choosing his successor. [redacted]

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Moubarek has demonstrated considerable skill over the years in outmaneuvering rivals among Sadat's confidants [redacted]

[redacted] Moubarek almost certainly remembers that few observers thought Sadat would survive long when he took power in 1970; he was widely believed to be only a transitional figure lacking the political acumen to maintain his position in the face of maneuvering by potential opponents. [redacted]

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Key Interest Groups—Sadat's Inner Circle

In addition to Moubarek, the President's inner circle of advisers is composed of Sadat's wife Jehan, a few senior ministers, and several trusted confidants. Mrs.

Among the Cabinet members, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs Mansur Hassan may be most influential. Alone among government officials, Hassan does not have to seek Moubarek's approval to see Sadat and is said to enjoy virtually unlimited access to the President. A former member of the People's Assembly, Hassan also serves as Minister of State for Culture and Information and has considerable support in the NDP. [redacted]

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Hassan did not serve in the armed forces and has not developed close ties to the Egyptian military. As a result, he probably lacks sufficient support among the officer corps to challenge Moubarek. Should Sadat and Moubarek have a falling out, however, Hassan is a leading candidate to replace Moubarek as Vice President. He is already taking on an increasing foreign policy role. After Sadat's visit to the United States, Hassan visited Western Europe and Oman to report on the discussions in Washington. [redacted]

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*Minister of State for
Presidential Affairs Mansur
Hassan.*

Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali has the military credentials that Hassan lacks but seems less ambitious. Although Ali is a former Defense Minister he does not appear to have widespread support among the officer corps. Ali is close to Moubarek and probably would support the Vice President's claim to the presidency unless Moubarek committed a major blunder. In that case Ali might be a consensus candidate of Sadat's inner circle and of military leaders. Several Sadat confidants, including former People's Assembly Speaker Sayid Marei and former Prime Minister Khalil, could emerge as figurehead candidates for the inner circle but only if Moubarek or the other major challengers were unable to resolve a succession crisis.

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Sadat's informal advisers include two businessmen, Ashraf Marwan and Osman Ahmad Osman. Both have been in and out of government during Sadat's tenure and have served him as emissaries to foreign governments. Their reputations for corruption probably preclude either of them becoming President, but they probably would play a role in choosing a successor. Sadat also relies heavily on several foreign policy specialists, including Minister of State Butrus Ghali, Special Presidential Adviser Hassan Tuhami, and



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*Foreign Minister Kamal
Hassan Ali.*

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Deputy Foreign Minister Usama al Baz. None of these advisers has an independent power base, however, and Ghali's religion—he is a Coptic Christian—rules him out.

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The Military's Role

The senior officer corps will play an important although indirect role in the succession process. The military is not likely to put forward its own candidate unless a crisis develops, but any new leader must have at least the tacit support of key military leaders. The officer corps prides itself on standing aloof from domestic politics and on its professional role. The senior leadership is not accustomed to interfering in politics and has no experience in working together on political issues.

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Moubarek, as former commander of the Air Force, has considerable support among the Air Force hierarchy, which he has continued to cultivate since being named Vice President in 1975. He has far less support, however, among the much larger and more influential Army command.

If Moubarek's succession moved smoothly and appeared to enjoy widespread support in the Egyptian political elite, however, the Army probably would suppress its doubts.

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If Moubarek's candidacy faltered, Defense Minister Mohammad Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazala could emerge as a contender for succession. Abu Ghazala is self-assured, exceptionally hard working and ambitious, and enjoys considerable popularity in the military.



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No other figure in the military has Abu Ghazala's credentials or preeminence. Former Defense Minister Jamasi, who once seemed a likely heir to Sadat, now reportedly has little following in the military.

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Other Interest Groups

Sadat's National Democratic Party is not a mass-based organization and probably would rubberstamp Moubarek or any other candidate chosen by the inner circle. Although there are a handful of leftist opposition delegates in the People's Assembly, the NDP's overwhelming majority should assure that Sadat loyalists control the legislative process.

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Among opposition groups only the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood has enough popular support to influence—even marginally—the succession process. The Brotherhood probably would not put forward its own candidate but might informally make its views known to the inner circle and People's Assembly. In the event of a succession crisis, the military leadership might consult with the Brotherhood about a new President.

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The Islamic hierarchy in Egypt, the *ulema*, would be expected to back the People's Assembly's candidate. Most of the senior *ulema*, including the influential head of Al-Azhar University, have close ties to Sadat and would probably accept Moubarek or another Sadat loyalist. Dissident *ulema* leaders closely tied to the more radical elements of the fundamentalist movement would have no voice in the succession process.

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The left in Egypt lacks popular support. A few of Nasir's aides remain prominent in journalistic circles but they have no political power or popular backing.

Defense Minister Abdul Halim
Abu Ghazala

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The small Communist Party is outlawed and operates mostly among exiles. The legal leftist establishment serves as a voice for intellectual dissenters but has little political power.

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Policies of a Loyalist Successor

A regime headed by Moubarek, Hassan, or Abu Ghazala probably would be preoccupied with consolidating its hold on power for at least several months. During this period Sadat's policy of gradually liberalizing the Egyptian political system probably would be abandoned. Sadat's popular effort to encourage foreign investment (the Open Door policy) and liberalize the economic system probably would continue.

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In foreign affairs, all of these candidates are closely identified with the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and support close ties with the United States. Moubarek and Abu Ghazala might even move closer to the United States on strategic issues

Moubarek has visited the United States often as Sadat's emissary on arms sales and Abu Ghazala served as Egypt's Defense Attaché in Washington from 1976 to 1980. They seem less concerned than Sadat with the domestic political costs of close identification with the United States, and both are strongly anti-Soviet.

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A successor regime dominated by Sadat's loyalists probably would seek closer ties with the other Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia. Improved relations with the Saudis raise the possibility of renewed Saudi economic aid and would be popular with most Egyptians.

Such a development would also reinforce a successor's claim to leadership in the Arab world and thus further strengthen the regime.

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Moubarek or other Sadat supporters are not likely to renounce peace with Israel. New strains in ties with Israel would be likely, however, since Egyptian efforts to improve relations with the Arabs would cause unease in Tel Aviv. After Israel completes its withdrawal from eastern Sinai in April 1982, a new Egyptian regime might be more inclined than Sadat to downgrade or even sever diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv to appease Riyadh and end Egypt's isolation in the Arab world. The Egyptians would move carefully to avoid giving Israel any excuse for military action, however, and probably would scrupulously adhere to the military disengagement aspects of the peace accords.

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A new Egyptian government would explain such moves to the United States as the inevitable result of Israeli "intransigence" in the Palestinian autonomy negotiations. The Egyptians probably would remain committed to finding a negotiated settlement to the Palestinian question, but they might take a lower profile and allow other Arab governments a larger role in determining Arab strategy toward Israel.

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A Revolutionary Alternative

Egyptian politics have traditionally been stable and largely nonviolent. Most Egyptians respect authority and in some ways tend to view their leader as a latter-day Pharaoh. With the exception of the Coptic Christian minority, the population is homogenous. Centuries of marginal existence dependent on the bounty of the Nile have impressed on Egyptians the need for a stable political system.

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Nonetheless, Egypt has experienced violent upheavals in the last century. Anti-British feelings erupted in 1882 and 1919. Dissatisfaction with the corrupt Farouk monarchy led to massive riots in Cairo in January 1952 which set the stage for the bloodless coup that brought Nasir to power later that year.

Minor demonstrations in 1975 and the much more serious food riots in 1977 showed that the potential for widespread civil unrest continues to exist

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Although it is unlikely, Egypt could again undergo a revolutionary experience if Sadat were to attempt unpopular economic reforms as he did in 1977 or if the economy rapidly declined. An upheaval might also occur if Sadat continues to drive the Muslim Brotherhood underground and the Brotherhood calls for revolution. Finally, a prolonged succession crisis during which Sadat loyalists jockeyed for position could encourage the left or Islamic fundamentalist groups to make a bid for power.

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The military would play a key role in virtually any of these scenarios and probably would step in to take power itself. During a period of prolonged civil unrest, for example, senior officers might press Sadat to resign and turn power over to a military figure like Abu Ghazala or to a junta of leading generals. Such a regime could seek an accommodation with the fundamentalist right to broaden its base of support and restore domestic tranquility.

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A military regime almost certainly would move closer to the other Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia, to gain economic and political support. It would be strongly tempted to attenuate ties with Israel but unlikely to court a military confrontation. Few Egyptian officers favor more wars with Israel. While some effort might be made to distance Egypt from the United States, the military would want to maintain the arms supply relationship. Egyptian fundamentalists would continue to oppose any rapprochement with the USSR.

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It is unlikely that the Egyptian military would collapse as the Iranian military did in the face of prolonged fundamentalist-directed political strife, but this cannot be ruled out completely. A fundamentalist-led regime would almost certainly take actions that would precipitate a crisis with Israel and possibly another Arab-Israeli war. It might not be constrained by the lack of a major power patron for such a confrontation and could behave as recklessly as Ayatollah Khomeini's Iranian regime.

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A leftist regime could emerge only through a military coup. Elements of the Egyptian intelligentsia remain inclined toward Communism and Nasir's brand of socialism.

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Such a regime would renew a close relationship with the USSR. It would be reluctant to enter into war with Israel without substantial Soviet support, but it might miscalculate and blunder into a confrontation.

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Appendix

Mohamed Hosni Moubarek

Since his appointment as Vice President, Moubarek has matured greatly in his job, and has proved himself a shrewd domestic political manipulator. Sadat and Moubarek are personally close, and the President respects Moubarek's views, especially on matters of regional security. From the beginning of his tenure as Vice President, Moubarek was sent on presidential missions abroad. In recent years he has been given increasing domestic responsibilities as deputy chairman of Sadat's National Democratic Party and as chairman of the National Security Committee and the National Security Council. His particular province is oversight of the military and intelligence services.



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Vice President Hosni
Moubarek, the front-runner to
succeed Sadat.

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Sadat, however, generally regards Moubarek as a solid second in command,

Others tend to view him as hardy and hard working,

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Moubarek was born in 1928 in Minufiyah Governorate, the birthplace of Anwar Sadat and several other successful men. Moubarek's father was a small land-owner and civil servant from a prominent Nile delta family. One of Moubarek's uncles, a physician, was influential in the Muslim Brotherhood. Moubarek's upbringing was typically Muslim, and he probably was inculcated early in life with such Islamic tenets as loyalty to the extended family and the importance of personal honor.

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Although he seemed to his classmates to be headed toward a career as a sportsman, Moubarek entered the Egyptian Military Academy. He graduated first in ranking both from the Military Academy in 1949 and from the Air Academy in 1950. He began his Air Force career as a fighter pilot before transferring to bombers. As a pilot, Moubarek was known for his coolness and bombing skills. He attended two Soviet bomber schools and the Soviet General Staff College in the 1950s. He rose quickly in the Air Force, eventually becoming commander of the Air Academy in 1967. In 1969 he became Air Force Chief of Staff, and in 1972 Sadat appointed him Commander in Chief of the Air Force over several other more senior officers.

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Moubarek emerged from the October 1973 war as a hero. As Air Force Chief of Staff, he initiated a program of intense training that greatly improved Air Force capabilities. During the war, he adopted a successful strategy of restraint, launching a well-planned and well-executed initial strike against Israel

and then protecting his aircraft in prepared positions against subsequent Israeli attacks. This strategy avoided the large aircraft losses suffered in previous wars and won for him his promotion by Sadat to Air Marshall in 1974. Sadat named him Vice President in 1975.

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Moubarek's nonmilitary political experience began with his promotion to Vice President. Since then he has applied himself assiduously to the task of learning his job. He has studied Sadat carefully and fills his off-hours with political science reading in both English and Arabic.

Moubarek's poise, self-confidence, and effectiveness have steadily improved.

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Appearance and Style

In most social situations he is soft spoken, friendly, and sensitive. He has a sense of humor. When talking business, he is often direct.

Moubarek [redacted] works hard—long hours with deep concentration—and even his hobbies, such as reading military books, are work related. In general, he seems to cultivate the image of an honest soldier. Moubarek professes pride in his “peasant” (actually middle-class) background; he is almost certainly emulating Sadat's own studied identification with the Egyptian peasant.

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Moubarek is intensely active, and pictures himself a man of action. He disdains indecisiveness in others, particularly “intellectuals,” and has little tolerance for prolonged theoretical arguments.

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A Disciplined Character

Moubarek is inclined to be cautious, deliberate, and rational; he emphasizes reason, logic, and control of emotion, and appears to most observers to be steady, reliable, and conscientious.

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He is willing to change his views in the light of new, more accurate information and to reassess his decisions pragmatically.

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Moubarek maneuvers adroitly within Egyptian internal politics and appreciates its complexities.

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Although Moubarek has friends and supporters in numerous important positions, his successful political maneuvering has also earned him a number of enemies among influential members of Sadat's inner circle, such as Ashraf Marwan or former intelligence chief Mahi.

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